Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People

Able to claw straight up a brick wall, squeeze through a pipe the width of a quarter, and gnaw through iron and concrete, rats are also revealed in this fascinating book to be incredibly intelligent and capable of great compassion. Weaving science, history, culture, and folklore, award-winning writer Albert Marrin offers a look at rats that goes from curious to repulsive, horrifying to comic, fearsome to inspiring. Arresting black-and-white scratchboard illustrations with bold red accents add visual punch to this study of a creature that has annoyed, disgusted, nourished, and intrigued its human neighbors throughout the centuries.

My Personal Review:
I thought I knew a lot about rats. I did. After having read Robert Sullivan's book for adults, Rats: Observations on the History and Habitat of the City's Most Unwanted Inhabitants, I found myself under the distinct impression that Sullivan had told me everything about rats that there was to know. Imagine my shock then when, upon picking up Albert Marrin's, Oh, Rats!: The Story of Rats and People, I discovered fact after fact after fact that I didn't know at all. Did you know that there was once a prehistoric rat that was seven feet long 17 million years ago? Or that a rat can collapse its skeleton so as to fit into tight places? Marrin doesn't just look at rats. He examines their bad and good (they have some) qualities in such a way that his book comes across as the foremost children's literature authority on the critters proper. Stir in C.B. Mordans woodcut-like illustrations and you have yourself one heckuva book. One that will have even its adult readers alternately aghast and entranced.

Rats. You know em. You hate em. But no matter what your thoughts on these large rodentia, you've never seen them like this. In scintillating detail, Albert Marrin tracks the rat/human progress and how one species has helped or hurt (usually hurt) the other over the course of our evolution. From their ancestors to how they've killed us with plague, eaten our food, or been eaten by us (yum!) we see rats in every form and face. We view them as caring family members and fast breeders. Anything and
everything a kid may ever want to know about rats is here, and its hard to look away from what Marrin is displaying before our eyes (no matter how much you may want to).

As to their intelligence, Marrin spares no detail. Some rats have learned to fish by dangling their worm-like tails in the water and then pouncing on the interested fishies. Time after time Marrin was surprising me with what he knew. Listen to this: Sometimes able-bodied rats lead blind rats. They do this by allowing the blind rat to hold on to the tail of another or by holding one end of a stick in its mouth. I was happy to see that in the course of Marrins rat history he included some information on lab rat testing. Its an evenhanded account, offering both sides of the debate and giving kids the chance to decide whether or not they think its useful or uselessly cruel.

The design of the book is incredibly impressive as well. First of all, you have C.B. Mordans pictures dotting every page, so well done there. Then, at the same time, the pages are broken up in various boxes. The only colors in this book are black, white, and a deep scarlet. Scarlet boxes move from page to page offering sidenotes of equal or surpassing interest to the text itself. Sometimes the book will open up onto a full-page picture of rats balancing on telephone wires or led by a Pied Piper to their doom. And on occasion Marrin seems to run out of strictly rat-related factoids so he may, for example, complement a passage on rat-eating with a list of other peculiar foods people will eat. Youll find blue jay stomachs and flies in honey sauce amongst others.

I kept marking the interesting passages so that Id remember them when I wrote this review. Then, when it came time to review this book, I found myself overwhelmed by the number of interesting facts Id marked. A single pair of rats can have 359 million descendants in three years! Isnt that wild? Or that a rat king is when a bunch of rats are stuck together by their tails. Or that rats lived with cavemen. Its true! And they cripple elephants in zoos (Ill spare you how). Or that, the U.S. Department of Agriculture sets standards for the amount of rodent hairs and feces allowed in food such as peanut butter. I feel badly not telling you about every single interesting passage I marked up, but you may as well read the book as listen to me. Lets just say there were at least ten other passages marked in my copy of Oh, Rats! that Im bitterly regretting not recounting them here.

The Bibliography in the back was especially interesting. Not only was there a proper listing of all rat-related nonfiction (both for children and adults) but also a list of suggested reading. Here you will find books on rat care, rats in literature, classic childrens books like Charlottes Web that contain rats, and a More Books To Enjoy section that contains rat characters of every stripe. From Gregor the Overlander to Redwall, the best-known rats are here for kids to read up on. An excellent idea for a Bibliography all around. With all this citing from a factual bonanza it seems odd that Marrin would relate that the Ring Around the Rosy poem is definitely about the plague. There is no hard and fast evidence to support this and many claim to have
debunked the theory in the past. Its a fun idea, but no one has ever come up with a clear cut Middle English recounting of the poem. Marrin does not mention this.

Still, for the most part, Oh, Rats! is just purely factual fun. A non-fiction title that kids can enjoy, parents can enjoy, and anyone who's ever wondered about rodentia proper can appreciate. Even people like myself who thought they knew all there was to know about the nasty critters will find themselves time and time again shocked and delighted by all the facts Marrin was able to relate. Kid-friendly, very pleasant on the eye, and just a delight through and through. A top notch presentation from a top notch author/illustrator team.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Oh Rats! The Story of Rats and People - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!